1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

412 rubbing face-paint, for bruising woody tissue to aid in breaking ekatilla poles for house-frames or mesquite roots for harpoons (both afterward finished by firing), and on occasion for weapons; and this many-functioned tool is initially but a wave-worn pebble, is artificially shaped only by the wear of use, and is incontinently discarded when sharp edges are produced by use or fortuitous fracture. The hupf is supplemented chiefly by the simple perforator of mandible or bone or fire-hardened wood; and these two primitive implements, together with molluscan shells in natural condition, apparently serve as the primary tools for all the mechanical operations of the tribe.

726 The dearth of tools and the absence not only of knives but of knife-sense among the Seri illumine those traditions of Seri fighting made tangible by the teeth-torn arm of Jesus Omada; for they explain the alleged recourse of the Seri warriors to nature's weapons, used in the centripetal fashion characteristic of nascent intelligence.

186 The Seri are distinguished by another trait hardly less striking than the pedestrian habit, and even more conspicuous than the tooth-and-nail habit with the correlative absence of tool-sense; the trait is not tangible enough for ready definition or description in terms (of course because so unusual as not to have bred words for its expression), but is akin to—or, more properly, an exceeding intensification of—race-pride in all its protean manifestations; it may be called *race-sense*. Like other primitive folk, the Seri are self-centered (or egocentric) in individual thought, i. e., they habitually think of the extraneous phenomena of their little universe with reference to *self*, as in the labyrinth of consanguineal relationship extending and ramifying from the speaker; furthermore, they typify primitive culture in their collective thinking, which is tribe-centered (or ethnocentric), i. e., they view extraneous things, especially those of animate nature, with reference to the tribe, like all those lowly folk who denote themselves by the most dignified terms in their vocabulary and designate aliens by opprobrious epithets; but the Seri outpass most, if not all, other tribes in dignifying themselves and derogating contemporary aliens. Concordantly with this habitual sentiment, they glory in their strength and swiftness, and are inordinately proud of their fine figures and excessively vain of their luxuriant locks—indeed, they seem to exalt their own bodies and their own kind well toward, if not beyond, the verge of inchoate deification. The obverse of the same sentiment appears in the hereditary hate and horror of aliens attested by their history, by their persistent blood-thirst, and by the rigorous marriage regulations adapted to the maintenance of tribal purity; for just as their highest virtue is the shedding of alien blood, so is their blackest crime the transmission of their own blood into alien channels. The potency of the sentiment is established by the unparalleled isolation of the tribe after centuries of contact with Caucasians, by their irreducible love of native soil, by their implacable animosity toward invaders, and by

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Summarily, the customary apparel of Seri men and women may be regarded as limited to three articles—(1) a kilt, normally of coarse textile fabric, which is made a prime necessity by a well-developed pudency; (2) a short wammus, also normally of coarse textile fabric, which is apparently regarded as a convenience and luxury rather than a necessity; and (3) a robe, normally of pelican skin, sometimes substituted for either or both of the other articles, but ordinarily used as bedding or as a buckler. The most valued of these articles is the robe, which in the absence of the others replaces the kilt; yet pudency demands the habitual use of some form of kilt, while both wammus and robe are held so far superfluous that they may be laid aside or bartered or otherwise dispensed with whenever occasion arises.

On considering the special functions and probable genesis of the Seri apparel, the student is impressed by the absence of the breech-clout, except perhaps in temporary improvisations—though the absence of this widespread article of primitive costumery need awaken little surprise in view of the environment, and especially of the abounding barbs of Seriland, which render all apparel of doubtful value save for the protection of tissues softened by habitual covering. The prevailing thornlessness of the habitat renders the free-flowing and easily removable apron the most serviceable protection for the exposed vitals of the pubic region; and this device, a common one in thorny habitats generally, grades naturally into the short skirt or kilt; while it would well accord with the maritime habit and habitual thought of the Seri to apply the tough and densely feathered skin of the pelican to the purpose. This suggestion as to the nascent covering of the tribe consists with the tribal faith, in which the Ancient of Pelicans ranks as the creative deity, while its modern representative is esteemed a protective tutelary possessing talismanic powers against cold, wet, bestial claw and fang, alien arrows, and all other evils; so that the use of this feathered pelt as a shield against spiny shrubbery, sharp-leaved sedges, and barb-thorned cacti is quite in harmony with Seri philosophy. Accordingly it seems clear that the pelican-skin kilt was autochthonous among the Seri, and that it was the original form of tribal apparel; and it is of no small significance that the type persists in actual use as well as in suggestive vestigial forms, such as pelican-down swaddling for infants, pelican-feather plumes on cradle nets, etc.

The passage from the pelican-skin kilt to the garment of textile fabric under the slow processes of primitive thought may not be traced confidently, though a strong suggestion arises in the Seri hair-cult (a Samoan faith not without parallel in far higher culture) under which mystical powers and talismanic virtues are imputed to the human pelage. It is in connection with this cult that the Seri locks are so attentively cultivated and so assiduously preserved and consecrated to more intimate personal uses in belts, necklaces, and the like; and although the connecting links have not been found, it is thoroughly

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

174 In accord with Seri thought to assume that in earlier times the hair
291 necklaces were expanded into rudimentary apparel in connection with
[826] pelican-skin shields, and after the conquest of vegetal fibers into more finished garments probably woven partly of hair and worn in such wise as to supplement the natural pelage in the protection of back, shoulders, chest, and arms. If the indication of the tribal cult be valid, it would appear that the wammus was the second piece of apparel in order of genesis, though the first to be made of artificial fabric; and it is noteworthy that the suggestion is supported by the form of the short and free-flowing garment underlying the flowing tresses of warriors and matrons, as well as the vestigial use of human-hair cords for neckbands and fastening strings; while its antiquity in comparison with the textile kilt is indicated by the fact that it is a finished artifact, evidently fitted to its functions by generations of adjustment.

The step from the making of the wammus to the substitution of artificial fabrics for the pelican-skin kilt was an easy and natural one; and it need only be noted that the transition is still incomplete, since the feathered pelt is unquestioningly substituted for the fabric whenever occasion demands, yet that the kilt in some form must be much more archaic than the wammus, since it is correlated with the pudency sense,[1] while the complete garment is not so correlated save in slight and incipient degree.

Accordingly the three articles of apparel may be seriated genetically as (1) the pelican-skin robe, used long as a kilt, and only lately relegated to emergency use and bedding; (2) the well-differentiated wammus of textile fabric with hair-cord fastenings; and (3) the textile kilt, with or without a hair-cord belt. And the three artifacts are local and presumptively—indeed manifestly—autochthonous, and exemplify the interdependence of artifacts and environment no less strikingly than the Seri balsa or basket or jacal.

TOOLS AND THEIR USES

000 In advanced culture tools are finished products, made and used in accordance with preconceived designs or established arts for the production of commodities; in primal life (as well exemplified by Seri handicraft) tools are mere by-products incidental to the largely instinctive activities directed toward the maintenance of life. Accordingly, the tools of advanced culture form the nucleus of industries, while the designless tools of the prime cluster about the outskirts of industrial

[1] In this writing the conclusion reached in an unpublished discussion of the beginning of clothing is assumed—i. e., that the primal apparel was purely protective, and that the habitual concealment of portions of the body incidental to its wearing gradually planted the pudency sense. The germ of clothing, without attendant pudency, is well illustrated in Karl von den Steinen's observations and discussions of the Brazilian natives (Unter den Naturvölkern Zentral-Brasiliens, Berlin, 1894, pp. 159-165). It is noteworthy that the Seri, more primitive as they are in so many respects than any other American aborigines known, are much farther advanced than the Brazilian natives in apparelling and its effects on character. The similarities and the differences are alike interesting; yet in both cases the customs reflect environmental conditions and wants with remarkable fidelity.